

Information on Gonorrhea



What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Gonorrhea is caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, a bacterium that can grow and multiply easily in the warm, moist areas of the reproductive tract, including the cervix (opening to the womb), uterus (womb), and fallopian tubes (egg canals) in women, and in the urethra (urine canal) in women and men. The bacterium can also grow in the mouth, throat, eyes, and anus.

How common is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a very common infectious disease. CDC estimates that more than 700,000 persons in the U.S. get new gonorrheal infections each year. In 2004, the rate of reported gonorrheal infections was 113.5 per 100,000 persons.

How do people get gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is spread through contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus. Ejaculation does not have to occur for gonorrhea to be transmitted or acquired. Gonorrhea can also be spread from mother to baby during delivery.

Who is at risk for gonorrhea?

Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea. In the United States, the highest reported rates of infection are among sexually active teenagers, young adults, and African Americans.

What are the signs and symptoms of gonorrhea?

Although many men with gonorrhea may have no symptoms at all, some men have some signs or symptoms that appear two to five days after infection; symptoms can take as long as 30 days to appear. Symptoms and signs include a burning sensation when urinating, or a white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis. Sometimes men with gonorrhea get painful or swollen testicles. In women, the symptoms of gonorrhea are often mild, but most women who are infected have no symptoms. Even when a woman has symptoms, they can be so non-specific as to be mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection. The initial symptoms and signs in women include a painful or burning sensation when urinating, increased vaginal discharge, or vaginal bleeding between periods. Women with gonorrhea are at risk of developing serious complications from the infection, regardless of the presence or severity of symptoms. Symptoms of rectal infection in both men and women may include discharge, anal itching, soreness, bleeding, or painful bowel movements. Rectal infection also may cause no symptoms. Infections in the throat may cause a sore throat but usually causes no symptoms.

What are the complications with gonorrhea?

Untreated gonorrhea can cause serious and permanent health problems in both women and men. In women, gonorrhea is a common cause of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). About one million women each year in the United States develop PID. In men, gonorrhea can cause epididymitis, a painful condition of the testicles that can lead to infertility if left untreated. Gonorrhea can spread to the blood or joints. This condition can be life threatening. In addition, people with gonorrhea can more easily contract HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. HIV-infected people with gonorrhea are more likely to transmit HIV to someone else.

How does gonorrhea affect a pregnant woman and her baby?

If a pregnant woman has gonorrhea, she may give the infection to her baby as the baby passes through the birth canal during delivery. This can cause blindness, joint infection, or a life-threatening blood infection in the baby.

How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

Several laboratory tests are available to diagnose gonorrhea. A doctor or nurse can obtain a sample for testing from the parts of the body likely to be infected (cervix, urethra, rectum, or throat) and send the sample to a laboratory for analysis.

What is the treatment for gonorrhea?

Several antibiotics can successfully cure gonorrhea in adolescents and adults. However, drug-resistant strains of gonorrhea are increasing in many areas of the world, including the United States, and successful treatment of gonorrhea is becoming more difficult. It is important to take all of the medication prescribed to cure gonorrhea. Persons with gonorrhea should be tested for other STDs. Although medication will stop the infection, it will not repair any permanent damage done by the disease. People who have had gonorrhea and have been treated can get the disease again if they have sexual contact with persons infected with gonorrhea.

How can gonorrhea be prevented?

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual intercourse, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of gonorrhea.

Where can I get more information?

Central District Health Department, Office of Epidemiology, Surveillance, and Community Assessment
707 N. Armstrong Pl.
Boise, ID
208-327-8625

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)
[CDC National Prevention Information Network](#) (NPIN)
[American Social Health Association](#) (ASHA)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, June 13, 2006

If you have additional questions, please call your doctor or local health department.

Central District Health Department
www.cdhd.idaho.gov

Central District Health Department
707 N. Armstrong Place
Boise, ID 83704
208-327-8625

Valley County Office
703 N. First Street
McCall, ID 83638
208-634-7194

Elmore County Office
520 E. 8th Street N.
Mountain Home, ID 83647
208-587-4407